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## *Senate*

### **RETURN FROM MIDDLE EASTERN FACT-FINDING MISSION TRIP**

Mr. President, 10 days ago, I returned home from a bipartisan, bicameral congressional factfinding mission that took a number of Members, including Senator *Chuck Hagel* of Nebraska, myself, and Congresswoman *Ellen Tauscher* from California, to a number of Middle Eastern countries. There we met with, among others, the leaders of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, as well as with our own civilian and military leaders. For me, our visit was informative, highly informative, even illuminating, and provided me with a number of insights that I wish to share today with my colleagues and with the American people.

For the past several months, Americans have become increasingly skeptical about our ongoing military presence in Iraq, leading to a fierce debate on how to succeed in Iraq and when to begin to redeploy American troops. With so much discord at home, I was surprised and, frankly, heartened to learn during our mission that there is a growing consensus among both U.S. and Iraqi civilian and military officials on a

reasonable path forward that I believe many Americans can embrace.

As our President acknowledged somewhat belatedly today, a number of grievous mistakes were made during his administration following the ouster of Saddam Hussein—for example, literally telling the Iraqi army to go home, you are disbanded, not needed anymore. Having said that, there is a whole lot at stake, too much at stake, for us to just cut and run. But somewhere between withdrawing all U.S. forces within 6 months and staying the course is a commonsense policy and a path forward for the United States, for Iraq, and for its Arab neighbors.

I believe tomorrow's parliamentary elections and the likely emergence of a coalition government in Iraq gives us a great opportunity, not so much to stay the course but to begin to alter it. This altered course would provide for a moderate but significant redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq beginning early next year. It could start with our National Guard men and women, might start with our Reserve Forces. We might bring some of them home. Some of them

we may wish to deploy to a place such as Afghanistan where they probably would be needed.

Redeployment or drawdown is, maybe, a good beginning, but by no means does it end there. We must also redouble our effort to enlist the full cooperation of the Arab League and others to stabilize Iraq politically and economically as we continue to help Iraq militarily and their police force shoulder more of the burden in providing security in their country.

On the sensitive issue of withdrawing U.S. troops, I believe if we were to withdraw all of our military forces within the next 6 or even 12 months, we would leave that country in danger of a civil war, and America and Iraq's neighbors would be less safe, not more safe, than they were before we invaded Iraq. The truth is, though, a modest American force may well be needed in Iraq for some time. While it will not be close to the 160,000 or so troops we have there now, America will likely maintain some kind of military presence in Iraq, if the Iraqis want us to, just as we currently do in Afghanistan and Kosovo and several other places around the world.

The President's open-ended statements, however well intentioned, about staying the course cause many Iraqis to question our Nation's true intentions. More and more, Iraqis view our troops as occupiers, not liberators. To a lot of them, the President's rhetoric is code for "We are here for your oil, and we are going to stay until we get it." That is an interpretation that fuels the very insurgency we are trying to defeat.

That is why it makes sense to me to announce as early as January that we plan to redeploy a significant number of American troops from Iraq in 2006 and then begin to do so shortly thereafter. Taking this step will help make clearer to most Iraqis our desire ultimately to leave Iraq and its natural resources where they belong--in the hands of Iraqis.

These views are not mine alone. They reflect the views of Iraq's civilian and military leaders as well as those of top American officials on the ground. We should listen to them. In the words of one of our top American military commanders, he said, pointing toward the door of the room in which we were meeting, it is time for us to begin moving toward the door. And I believe he is right. Otherwise, I fear our troops, who continue to perform courageously under incredibly difficult circumstances, will remain targets of opportunity for months or even years to come.

Although much of the debate in America has focused on withdrawing troops, if all we do by the end of next year is reduce our troop levels, we will not set Iraqis up for success; we will set them up for failure. There is also a political war to win, and it is not going to be easy. I believe America's Ambassador to Iraq, the gifted Zalmay Khalilzad, has done a remarkable job this year in narrowing the differences among competing factions in Iraq. Now it looks like tomorrow's turnout for the parliamentary elections will be strong, even among minority Sunnis, and result in the need to form a coalition government.

In fact, when we were there, we heard that the Sunnis--of which only 3 percent of them voted a year ago when they formed their interim government, and barely a third of them voted 2 or 3 months ago when they voted on their constitution--I understand now that over half the Sunnis are going to vote tomorrow. They will elect anywhere from 50 to 55 to maybe 60 members of this new parliament. The Kurds are expected to elect a similar number, and the Shiites will elect maybe 100, 110. There is not enough among any of them to have a majority. That outcome will create a need, and that is a need to form a coalition government.

The real challenge will come, though, after the vote, as Iraqis confront at least two enormous tasks. One is setting up a functioning government, and the second is rewriting or amending the constitution they just adopted a couple months ago, while at the same time trying to subdue an armed insurgency.

America must do all we can to make sure that the Iraqis' experiment with democracy does not founder, even if this experiment results in something less than a Jeffersonian democracy. But to succeed and become a new and prosperous country, Iraq will need more than just our help. European countries and other nations, including democratic nations, can do their part by helping Iraq set up government ministries and agencies designed to oversee everything from defense and finance to human services and environmental protection.

In fact, I strongly support a proposal that would call for individual countries to adopt a new ministry in Iraq and help them to develop and implement and

execute sound policies. For example, Nation A might adopt a finance ministry, Nation B might adopt a foreign ministry, Nation C might adopt the petroleum industry, Nation D might adopt the transportation industry, and on and on and on. It should not be just us; it should be a whole lot of countries joining with us in this effort.

Arab countries that have been extremely critical of the war and of America's occupation must realize they have a dog in this fight, too. On that point, I am more optimistic than I was before my trip. As Saudi King Abdullah told us a week or so ago--these are his words--"In Iraq, what's done is done." That is coming from a monarch, a King, who, frankly, did not appreciate, nor did his people much appreciate, our invading Iraq and taking down the regime of Saddam Hussein. But his words: "In Iraq, what's done is done." And from that, I infer he means it is time to turn a page. It is time for them and other Arab nations in that region to get off the bench and get into the game. And they sure need to.

To that end, I sense that many of Iraq's neighbors, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar, realize it is in their interest to make sure that Iraq does not erupt into civil war, a civil war that could become a regional war or turn Iraq into a haven for terrorism. Those nations could help ensure a better outcome in Iraq by, among other things, forgiving the Iraqi debt they hold while also working to improve political relations within Iraq. The United States, perhaps through the Arab League, should exert considerable influence in the region to make sure this happens.

Another area in which the United States and other nations can be helpful is to assist Iraq in formulating and implementing, next year, an economic recovery and growth strategy. Iraq, as we all know, is blessed with enormous oil and gas revenues. Yet it is almost beyond belief that today, some 30 months after the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the lifting of the oil embargo in Iraq, oil production in that country is really no higher today than it was on the day of our invasion. In fact, we were told on our visit that oil production today continues to hover at barely one-third of Iraq's capacity of some 5 million barrels of oil per day. But, roughly, that leaves 3 million barrels of oil a day untapped in the ground, even though there is the capacity to draw it out and to refine it and to sell it. At \$50 per barrel and 3 million barrels per day, that means that Iraq is leaving approximately \$150 million per day on the table in unrealized revenues. That is about \$1 billion a week. For \$1 billion a week, you could hire several armies to protect the generating capacity, the oil production capacity in that country.

That kind of revenue also would allow the Iraqis to have some money left over to meet a number of their needs. And they have plenty of needs to meet. That is money that could be used to lower the 25-percent unemployment rate among young Iraqis, along with the unemployment rate among adults in that country. How? By putting them to work on a host of worthy projects around the country--schools, health centers, roads and transit projects, housing, wastewater treatment, electricity generation, telecommunications infrastructure, and the list goes on.

Speaking of economic development, Saudi Arabia continues to increase its oil revenues by more fully integrating their oil and gas business to include surveying, exploration, drilling, recovery, refining, and transportation, as well as providing feedstocks to a growing petrochemical industry. There is no reason why Iraq could not also do the same over time.

But unlike a number of other Arab nations, Iraq's economy does not have to be what I call a one-trick pony. Iraq is blessed with an adequate water supply and plenty of fertile land. Crops, produce, and fruits raised on that land can feed all of Iraq and much of that region. We can help the Iraqis figure out how to realize their potential, and we ought to do it.

Iraq is also blessed with a well-educated workforce, many of whom would like to be entrepreneurs in their country as they move away from a command-and-control economy to more of a free enterprise system. I am told that last year some 30,000 Iraqis applied for business licenses to start their own businesses. A lot of them could have used an infusion of capital to get started, too. They did not need \$50,000 or \$100,000, either. In a number of instances, as little as a couple of hundred dollars is all they might have needed.

One of the missing ingredients in Iraq in terms of an economic recovery is a banking system that can make and service loans, including loans to small businesses, which generate a lot of the jobs. In America, we know banking. So do some other nations. We need, collectively, to do more to help Iraqis establish a banking system to fuel,

among other things, the growth of small businesses--the engine for job creation.

On a positive note, USAID has begun operating in Iraq trying to develop those micro-loan programs that they are putting in place in other nations around the world where maybe \$100 or \$200 or \$300 is extended in a loan to a small businessperson. That is a good program. It is just beginning, but it is one we ought to kick into high gear there.

The idea of Iraq as a tourist mecca was not the first thing that came to mind as we headed for that part of the world. Having said that, Iraq is the home of several of the holiest shrines in the Muslim world, and, lest we forget, it was also the cradle of civilization. Muslims come from all over the world already to visit a number of those holy shrines in Iraq. Given the chance, I believe a lot more of them would come to visit some of those holy places, other holy places, in Iraq if there were airports to serve them, along with restaurants and hotels, bus service, auto rental agencies, and the like.

Next, let me add a word or two about Iran, a largely Shiite nation that borders Iraq, as we know. Iraq's Shiite population lives primarily in the southern part of Iraq. Hundreds of thousands of people have crossed over the border from Iran into Iraq over the past year or two. Tens of millions of dollars have followed them into Iraq. Many in the region fear, understandably, that Iran is attempting to expand its influence through southern Iraq all the way to its border with Saudi Arabia. Others fear a balkanized Iraq divided into three parts, and maybe eventually

three countries, will evolve, and those fears are understandable.

Last week, in an unprecedented move, Iran's supreme religious leader, the real boss in that country--not the President, the real boss in that country--sent a personal emissary to Saudi Arabia to meet with its King, King Abdullah, apparently to begin a dialog. That was 2 weeks ago. I said 1 week. It was 2 weeks ago.

Recently, Iran has also sent word to U.S. officials in Iraq, through the U.N., through Shiite persons in Iraq, that the Iranians would also like to send, I believe, their national security adviser to meet in Iraq with our representatives there. I am told that our administration, apparently, is not prepared to give the green light for those talks, arguing that any talks should involve much lower level Iranian representation.

The words of another Arab leader we spoke to on this subject are instructional. That Arab leader said to us during our stay--he was talking about the U.S. unwillingness to join multilateral talks over Iran's nuclear policy but this monarch said to us:

Ignoring someone doesn't mean they cease to exist.

Think about those words: "Ignoring someone does not mean that they cease to exist." I would encourage our own administration to give American officials in Iraq the green light and find out what is on the Iranians' minds. It is hard to imagine much damage coming out of such a conversation, and there may be some upside to it. Time will tell.

If we are willing to engage in multilateral discussions with some of those wild and crazy North Koreans, I don't know that there is a lot of danger in sitting down and being involved in direct or multilateral relations with Iranians, all the while making clear that their possession of nuclear weapons is not acceptable to us and the views they have toward Israel and pushing Israel into the sea is anathema to us and something we would never countenance.

Let me conclude on the Middle East by sharing with my colleagues an old Navy story. Long before I came here, I served as a naval flight officer during the Vietnam War in Southeast Asia and later on as a Reserve naval flight officer and mission commander of a Navy P-3 airplane, a four-engine airplane. Our Presiding Officer may have seen the Navy P-3s land at Jacksonville, FL, any number of times in our job to hunt for Red October and patrol the oceans of the world.

Every now and then, we would have to change an engine in one of our planes. They break. You land the plane. You pull into the hangar and pull off the engine and put another one on. It takes a day or two, and you have to test it before you go up in the air again. In the Navy, if you had a really hard job to do, we would liken it to changing an aircraft engine in one of our planes. But a really tough job is one that we had to do by changing the engine of the airplane while the airplane was in flight. When you are doing that, that was a tough job.

What the Iraqis face in the coming weeks and months is the political, economic, and military equivalent of changing the aircraft engine while the

aircraft is in flight. Tomorrow, they are going to hold elections. The good news is that for 275 parliamentary seats, some 6,500 candidates have filed and are running. That is an astounding number. When the smoke clears literally and figuratively later in the week, they will have to figure out who won and who of those 6,500 lost. They will have to seat a parliament. Then they will have to start putting together a coalition government, not unlike what the Israelis do from time to time. Nobody is going to have a majority. The Shiites may have 100 or 120. But they will need other forces. Or maybe some of the rest of the people who are there, the Kurds or the Sunnis and others, can create a majority coalition on their own.

They will have to figure out who is going to be the prime minister or deputy prime ministers. They have to figure out who is going to be the minister of finance, of foreign affairs, of transportation, of housing, the environment, petroleum, on and on. They have to put the right people in the leadership roles of those agencies and have good people up or down the line in those agencies so they can formulate, implement, and execute policy.

While they are doing all of that, they will have to rewrite their constitution, or at least part of it. To make matters more challenging, they have to do it all while in the face of an armed insurgency. I suggest to my colleagues, doing any of those things in and of itself--going through the elections tomorrow, electing a parliament, standing up a government, putting the right people in place to lead those ministries, rewriting the constitution--any one of them by itself is a hard thing to do. Doing them all almost

simultaneously during the course of an armed insurgency, achieving that would be like the triumph of man's hope over experience.

I returned from Iraq more hopeful than when I left. I acknowledge that a lot of hard work lies ahead for us and,

hopefully, for a new coalition of the willing in the Middle East. While there are no easy choices or solutions, I acknowledge that. I think we know that. But if we do begin to alter course, as I have outlined earlier, I believe we increase the likelihood that America, Iraq, and its neighbors will arrive at the destination we all seek.